

STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES

ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF: [REDACTED],
Claimant

Reg. No: 2009-35522
Issue No: 1038; 3029
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
October 13, 2009
Calhoun County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Suzanne L. Keegstra

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on October 13, 2009. The claimant personally appeared and provided testimony.

ISSUE

Did the department properly determine the claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) case should be closed for Work First/Jobs, Education and Training (WF/JET) program noncompliance in September, 2009?

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the competent, material and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. The claimant attended WF/JET orientation on May 26, 2009.
(Department Exhibit 5).

2. The claimant was required to participate with WF/JET for 20 hours each week. The claimant signed a JET/WF Requirements Update that verified she knew she was to participate for 20 hours weekly. This document also defined noncompliance and indicated how many hours each job search would qualify for. (Department Exhibit 8, 20).

3. The claimant did not get in her required hours of participation most weeks. The claimant participated for 18 hours the week of May 24, 2009; zero hours the week of May 31, 2009; 20 hours the week of June 7, 2009; and zero hours for the weeks of June 14, June 21, June 28, July 5 and July 12, 2009. (Department Exhibit 8 - 18).

4. The claimant was referred for a triage by WF/JET on July 15, 2009, because she was not meeting her required hours of participation and had not turned in any documentation for schooling. (Department Exhibit 3).

5. The claimant was mailed a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444) on July 22, 2009, scheduling a triage appointment for July 30, 2009. (Department Exhibit 1 – 2).

6. The claimant was a no call/no show for the triage appointment. No good cause was found. (Department Exhibit 3).

7. The claimant was mailed a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) on August 5, 2009. (Department Exhibit 23 – 28).

8. The claimant turned in a hearing request on September 3, 2009.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Family Independence Program (FIP) was established pursuant to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193, 8 USC 601, *et seq.* The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the FIP program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3101-3131. The FIP program

replaced the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program effective October 1, 1996. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Bridges Reference Manual (BRM).

Department policy states:

DEPARTMENT PHILOSOPHY

FIP

DHS requires clients to participate in employment and self-sufficiency-related activities and to accept employment when offered. Our focus is to assist clients in removing barriers so they can participate in activities which lead to self-sufficiency. However, there are consequences for a client who refuses to participate, without good cause.

The goal of the FIP penalty policy is to obtain client compliance with appropriate work and/or self-sufficiency-related assignments and to ensure that barriers to such compliance have been identified and removed. The goal is to bring the client into compliance.

Noncompliance may be an indicator of possible disabilities. Consider further exploration of any barriers.

DEPARTMENT POLICY

FIP

A Work Eligible Individual (WEI), see BEM 228, who fails, without good cause, to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, must be penalized.

See BEM 233B for the Food Assistance Program (FAP) policy when the FIP penalty is closure. For the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) penalty policy, see BEM 233C. BEM 233A, p. 1.

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH EMPLOYMENT AND/OR SELF-SUFFICIENCY-RELATED ACTIVITIES

As a condition of eligibility, all WEIs and non-WEIs must work or engage in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities. Noncompliance of applicants, recipients, or member adds means doing any of the following without good cause:

- . Failing or refusing to:
 - .. Appear and participate with the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Program or other employment service provider.
 - .. Complete a Family Automated Screening Tool (FAST), as assigned as the first step in the FSSP process.
 - .. Develop a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or a Personal Responsibility Plan and Family Contract (PRPFC).
 - .. Comply with activities assigned to on the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or PRPFC.
 - .. Appear for a scheduled appointment or meeting related to assigned activities.
 - .. Provide legitimate documentation of work participation.
 - .. Participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities.
 - .. Accept a job referral.
 - .. Complete a job application.
 - .. Appear for a job interview (see the exception below).
- . Stating orally or in writing a definite intent not to comply with program requirements.
- . Threatening, physically abusing or otherwise behaving disruptively toward anyone conducting or participating in an employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activity.
- . Refusing employment support services if the refusal prevents participation in an employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. BEM 233A, pp. 1-2.

GOOD CAUSE FOR NONCOMPLIANCE

Good cause is a valid reason for noncompliance with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities that are based on factors that are beyond the control of the noncompliant person. A claim of good cause must be verified and documented for member adds and recipients. Document the good cause determination in Bridges and the FSSP under the “Participation and Compliance” tab.

See “School Attendance” BEM 201 for good cause when minor parents do not attend school.

Employed 40 Hours

Client Unfit

Good cause includes the following:

- . The person is working at least 40 hours per week on average and earning at least state minimum wage.
- . The client is physically or mentally unfit for the job or activity, as shown by medical evidence or other reliable information. This includes any disability-related limitations that preclude participation in a work and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. The disability-related needs or limitations may not have been identified or assessed prior to the noncompliance.

Illness or Injury

The client has a debilitating illness or injury, or an immediate family member’s illness or injury requires in-home care by the client.

Reasonable Accommodation

The DHS, employment services provider, contractor, agency, or employer failed to make reasonable accommodations for the client’s disability or the client’s needs related to the disability. BEM 233A, pp. 3-4.

No Child Care

The client requested Child Day Care Services (CDC) from DHS, the MWA, or other employment services provider prior to case

closure for noncompliance and CDC is needed for a CDC-eligible child, but none is appropriate, suitable, affordable and within reasonable distance of the client's home or work site.

- . **Appropriate.** The care is appropriate to the child's age, disabilities and other conditions.
- . **Reasonable distance.** The total commuting time to and from work and child care facilities does not exceed three hours per day.
- . **Suitable provider.** The provider meets applicable state and local standards. Also, providers (e.g., relatives) who are NOT registered/licensed by the DHS Office of Child and Adult Services must meet DHS enrollment requirements for day care aides or relative care providers. See PEM 704.
- . **Affordable.** The child care is provided at the rate of payment or reimbursement offered by DHS.

No Transportation

The client requested transportation services from DHS, the MWA, or other employment services provider prior to case closure and reasonably priced transportation is not available to the client.

Illegal Activities

The employment involves illegal activities.

Discrimination

The client experiences discrimination on the basis of age, race, disability, gender, color, national origin, religious beliefs, etc. BEM 233A, p. 4.

Unplanned Event or Factor

Credible information indicates an unplanned event or factor which likely prevents or significantly interferes with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities. Unplanned events or factors include, but are not limited to the following:

- . Domestic violence.
- . Health or safety risk.
- . Religion.

- . Homelessness.
- . Jail.
- . Hospitalization.

Comparable Work

The client quits to assume employment comparable in salary and hours. The new hiring must occur before the quit.

Long Commute

Total commuting time exceeds:

- . Two hours per day, NOT including time to and from child care facilities, **or**
- . Three hours per day, including time to and from child care facilities. BEM 233A, pp.4-5.

EFIP

EFIP unless noncompliance is job quit, firing or voluntarily reducing hours of employment.

NONCOMPLIANCE PENALTIES FOR ACTIVE FIP CASES AND MEMBER ADDS

The penalty for noncompliance without good cause is FIP closure. Effective April 1, 2007, the following minimum penalties apply:

- . For the first occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for 3 calendar months unless the client is excused from the noncompliance as noted in "First Case Noncompliance Without Loss of Benefits" below.
- . For the second occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for 3 calendar months.
- . For the third and subsequent occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for 12 calendar months.
- . The penalty counter also begins April 1, 2007 regardless of the previous number of noncompliance penalties.

TRIAGE

JET participants will not be terminated from a JET program without first scheduling a “triage” meeting with the client to jointly discuss noncompliance and good cause. Locally coordinate a process to notify the MWA case manager of triage meetings including scheduling guidelines.

Clients can either attend a meeting or participate in a conference call if attendance at the triage meeting is not possible. If a client calls to reschedule an already scheduled triage meeting, offer a phone conference at that time. Clients must comply with triage requirement within the negative action period.

When a phone triage is conducted for a first noncompliance and the client agrees to comply, complete the DHS-754, First Noncompliance Letter, as you would complete in a triage meeting. Note in the client signature box “Client Agreed by Phone”. Immediately send a copy of the DHS-754 to the client and phone the JET case manager if the compliance activity is to attend JET.

Determine good cause based on the best information available during the triage and prior to the negative action date. Good cause may be verified by information already on file with DHS or MWA.

If the FIS, JET case manager, or MRS counselor do not agree as to whether “good cause” exists for a noncompliance, the case must be forwarded to the immediate supervisors of each party involved to reach an agreement.

DHS must be involved with all triage appointment/phone calls due to program requirements, documentation and tracking.

Note: Clients not participating with JET must be scheduled for a “triage” meeting between the FIS and the client. This does not include applicants. BEM 233A, p. 7.

Good Cause Established

If the client establishes good cause within the negative action period, do **NOT** impose a penalty. See “Good Cause for Noncompliance” earlier in this item. Send the client back to JET, if applicable, after resolving transportation, CDC, or other factors which may have contributed to the good cause. Do not enter a new referral on ASSIST. Enter the good cause reason on the DHS-71 and on the FSSP under the “Participation and Compliance” tab.

Good Cause NOT Established

If the client does NOT provide a good cause reason within the negative action period, determine good cause based on the best information available. If no good cause exists, allow the case to close. If good cause is determined to exist, delete the negative action. BEM 233A, pp. 10-11.

When to Disqualify

- . Disqualify a FAP group member for noncompliance when:
 - . The client was active both FIP and FAP on the date of the FIP noncompliance, and
 - . The client did not comply with FIP employment requirements, and
 - . The client is not deferred from FAP work requirements (see DEFERRALS in PEM 230B), and the client did not have good cause for the noncompliance. PEM 233B, p. 1.

DEFERRALS

Clients meeting one of the criteria below are temporarily deferred from employment-related activities.

Age

Defer a person who is:

- . under age 16 or at least age 60; **or**
- . a 16- or 17-year old who is not the grantee; **or**
- . a grantee age 16 or 17 who
 - .. lives with a parent or person in that role, **or**
 - .. attends school at least **half time**, **or**
 - .. is enrolled in an employment/training program at least **half time**.

See PEM 240 and 245 for verification requirements. PEM, Item 230B, pp. 3-4.

Care of a Child

Defer one person who personally provides care for a child under age 6 in the FAP group. PEM, Item 230B, p. 4.

Noncompliance is defined by department policy as failing or refusing to do a number of activities, such as attending and participating with WF/JET, completing the FAST survey, completing job applications, participating in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, providing legitimate documentation of work participation, etc. BEM 233A. The claimant testified that she began to attend [REDACTED] in June, 2009 and that she stopped job searching at that time because she thought her school hours would count toward her hourly requirements.

However, even before the claimant attended the school, she was not compliant in her hours. The week of May 24, 2009 she only participated for 18 hours and the week of May 31, 2009 she participated for no hours. Thus, even before she attended school, she was noncompliant.

Further, the claimant never got the necessary authorization and provided any documentation of her school participation as required. The WF/JET case notes show that on June 26, 2009 the caseworker had a conversation with the claimant when the claimant informed her she was going to start attending [REDACTED]. The claimant was told by the caseworker to talk to the educational coordinator about it and get the information he would need to count the hours. The claimant never got the authorization from the educational coordinator and never provided any documentation to him of her school attendance, as he himself notes in the WF/JET case notes (see the July 27, 2009 entry made by Jim Wick). Therefore, the claimant never got the authorization to count her hours toward WF/JET participation and never provided

any documentation to show how many hours she was attending school. This is also noncompliance.

A claimant can have a noncompliance excused if there is good cause. Good cause is defined as a valid reason for noncompliance with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities that are based on factors that are beyond the control of the noncompliant person. BEM 233A. The claimant provided no reason for her noncompliance, other than to indicate that she was attending school and thought it would count toward her hours. As indicated above, the claimant did not get the authorization to count her school hours and never provided any documentation of the schooling. Thus, she was noncompliant with WF/JET requirements.

The claimant testified that she didn't get notice of the triage appointment. However, it was mailed to the proper address. The claimant testified that she moved to the Eldred Street address in June, 2009. The Notice of Noncompliance was mailed on July 22, 2009 and did go to the [REDACTED] address. The proper mailing and addressing of a letter creates a presumption of receipt. That presumption may be rebutted by evidence. *Stacey v Sankovich*, 19 Mich App 638 (1969); *Good v Detroit Automobile Inter-Insurance Exchange*, 67 Mich App 270 (1976). The claimant provides no evidence to rebut this presumption.

Further, even if the claimant did not get notice of the triage, she presents no good cause reason for her noncompliance at this hearing. Thus, this Administrative Law judge finds that the claimant can not be determined to have good cause for her noncompliance.

It is noted that the claimant does appear to have been sanctioned from the FAP group for the FIP noncompliance in error. The department testified that the claimant does have a child under the age of six, so she should not have been removed from the FAP group. Thus, the department did err in this action and testified it would be corrected.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department properly determined the claimant was noncompliant with WF/JET program requirements without good cause and properly determined her FIP case should be terminated. However, the department did err in sanctioning the claimant from the FAP group.

Accordingly, the actions of the department are UPHeld in part and REVERSED in part:

The department's actions of terminating the claimant's FIP benefits for noncompliance are UPHeld.

The department's actions of sanctioning the claimant from the FAP group is REVERSED.

The department shall reinstate the claimant to the FAP group back to the date of sanction and issue any retroactive benefits the claimant is entitled to.

SO ORDERED.

/s/ _____
Suzanne L. Keegstra
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: October 28, 2009

Date Mailed: October 29, 2009

NOTICE: Administrative Hearings may order a rehearing or reconsideration on either its own motion or at the request of a party within 30 days of the mailing date of this Decision and Order. Administrative Hearings will not order a rehearing or reconsideration on the Department's motion where the final decision cannot be implemented within 60 days of the filing of the original request.

The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court within 30 days of the receipt of the Decision and Order or, if a timely request for rehearing was made, within 30 days of the receipt date of the rehearing decision.

SLK [REDACTED]

cc: [REDACTED]